

AIRPORT ICE SURGE

TRAVEL WIKI



KNOW YOUR
RIGHTS

100-MILE
BORDER ZONE

DEVICE
HARDENING

METADATA
SCRUBBING

MARCH 2026

CROWDSOURCED TRAVEL
SECURITY MANUAL

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INFORMATION

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1. Executive Summary

The landscape of interior immigration enforcement in the United States has undergone a dramatic, militarized transformation during the 2025 and 2026 administrative periods. Unprecedented federal operations have resulted in the deployment of thousands of armed agents into metropolitan areas and domestic transit hubs, fundamentally altering the security calculus for travelers.¹ Concurrently, administrative directives have increasingly blurred the lines between routine aviation security and civil immigration enforcement. This convergence is most acutely demonstrated by the deployment of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) personnel to domestic airport security lines to supplement Transportation Security Administration (TSA) staffing shortages, effectively transforming routine transit checkpoints

into sites of intense immigration scrutiny.⁴

This synthesis of border enforcement authorities within interior transit hubs creates a highly complex legal environment. International airports represent a unique jurisdictional space—legally defined as the "functional equivalent of the border"—where traditional Fourth Amendment protections against warrantless searches are significantly diminished.⁷ Furthermore, operations such as "Operation Metro Surge" in Minnesota, which resulted in thousands of arrests and the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens, underscore the volatile nature of these deployments and the urgent need for community preparedness.¹ As transportation infrastructure becomes a primary vector for enforcement, communities require an exhaustive understanding of federal jurisdiction, constitutional rights, digital privacy protocols, and safe documentation practices. This report serves as a comprehensive travel wiki and operational guide to navigating, documenting, and surviving immigration enforcement surges at U.S. airports.

2. Glossary of Key Terminology

To accurately navigate the legal and operational landscape of U.S. immigration enforcement, a precise understanding of agency structures, legal doctrines, and technical terminology is required. The following table delineates the foundational vocabulary utilized throughout this report.

Term	Definition and Context
CBP (U.S. Customs and Border Protection)	The federal agency responsible for securing physical borders and operating at official Ports of Entry (POEs), including international airports. CBP derives its authority primarily from customs and border security mandates, processing all arriving international travelers. ¹⁰
ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement)	The federal agency primarily tasked with interior immigration enforcement and transnational criminal investigations. ICE operates predominantly within the interior of the United States rather than at the physical border. ¹²
ERO (Enforcement and Removal Operations)	A core division of ICE responsible for the apprehension, detention, and deportation

	of noncitizens within the U.S. interior. ERO manages the logistics of removal flights and domestic detainee transfers. ¹²
HSI (Homeland Security Investigations)	The criminal investigative arm of ICE, responsible for investigating transnational crimes such as human trafficking, smuggling, cybercrime, and export control violations. ¹²
Functional Equivalent of the Border	A legal doctrine establishing that certain locations within the interior of the U.S.—most notably international airports—are treated as the physical border for Fourth Amendment purposes, allowing for warrantless searches of arriving international travelers and cargo. ⁷
The 100-Mile Zone	A geographic area extending 100 air miles inland from any external boundary of the U.S. (including coastlines). Under federal regulation, CBP claims enhanced statutory authority to conduct warrantless vehicle boardings and operate checkpoints within this zone. ¹⁵
Secondary Inspection	An interview area at a port of entry where CBP officers conduct further, often more invasive, questioning and document review if admissibility cannot be immediately verified during primary inspection. ¹⁷
Expedited Removal	A statutory process allowing immigration officers to rapidly deport certain noncitizens without a hearing before an immigration judge. Historically limited to recent arrivals near the border, the application of this authority has faced significant administrative expansion. ¹⁹
Metadata	Hidden background data embedded within digital files (e.g., photographs, videos)

	containing information such as GPS coordinates, device identifiers, and timestamps, which poses severe privacy risks if not scrubbed prior to public sharing. ²²
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3. Verified Context Sources and the Information Ecosystem

The rapid mobilization of federal enforcement requires an equally agile network of community intelligence and open-source monitoring. Traditional media channels frequently experience latency in reporting the granular, street-level realities of immigration surges. Consequently, the research and community monitoring foundational to this report rely on a verified ecosystem of public-facing, decentralized intelligence sources.

The primary aggregation vector is the "Eyes on ICE: CSP Terminal" hosted via Google AI Studio, which serves as a centralized processing hub for analyzing raw community reports. Real-time tactical updates, including agent movements and checkpoint deployments at specific airport terminals, are heavily crowdsourced through the *r/EyesOnIce* Reddit community. This forum provides localized, peer-verified situational awareness that allows travelers to make immediate logistical decisions. For deeper, long-form analysis of policy shifts, legal injunctions, and the broader implications of operations like Metro Surge and Midway Blitz, the "Eyes On ICE" Substack operates as the primary analytical repository.

Furthermore, the rapid dissemination of urgent alerts and "Know Your Rights" (KYR) visual guides is executed through TikTok Studio, which optimizes short-form content for maximum virality among vulnerable demographics. Finally, the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) remains an indispensable conduit for public reactions, the circulation of eyewitness video documentation, and real-time tracking of flight data via resources such as the ICE Flight Monitor.²⁴ Together, these platforms form a resilient, multi-tiered information architecture that supports immediate tactical evasion and long-term strategic organizing.

4. The Legal Framework of Airport Immigration Enforcement

4.1. Jurisdictional Boundaries: CBP Versus ICE

The architecture of federal immigration enforcement is bifurcated, yet increasingly intertwined. Following the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the functions of border management and interior enforcement were divided under the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS).¹⁰ CBP was established as the primary gatekeeper, entrusted with patrolling the physical borders and operating the inspection infrastructure at official ports of entry, including

international airport terminals.¹⁰ ICE was structured to handle interior enforcement, specifically tasked with identifying, detaining, and removing individuals already present within the United States, as well as conducting complex criminal investigations through its HSI division.¹²

Despite these distinct mandates, the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) classifies agents from both CBP and ICE broadly as "immigration officers".²⁷ This shared statutory designation grants both agencies overlapping nationwide enforcement authorities. Specifically, agents from either agency possess the power to interrogate individuals they suspect of being noncitizens regarding their right to remain in the United States, and to execute warrantless arrests if an individual is believed to be violating immigration law and is likely to abscond before a warrant can be procured.²⁷ During the mass enforcement operations of 2025 and 2026, this overlap was leveraged to deploy CBP personnel into interior metropolitan areas alongside ICE agents, effectively dissolving the practical distinction between border management and interior policing.¹

4.2. The Functional Equivalent of the Border and the 100-Mile Zone

The Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution generally protects individuals from arbitrary, warrantless searches and seizures. However, jurisprudence has long recognized the "border search exception," a doctrine premised on the sovereign right of the nation to protect its territorial integrity by controlling who and what enters the country.²⁹ Under this exception, federal agents are permitted to conduct routine searches of luggage, vehicles, and persons at the physical border without requiring a warrant, probable cause, or even reasonable suspicion.¹⁰

Crucially for travelers, this doctrine extends beyond the literal geographic boundary to locations deemed the "functional equivalent of the border".⁷ The federal courts have unequivocally established that international airports operate as functional equivalents for arriving international flights.⁸ Consequently, passengers disembarking from a nonstop flight originating outside the United States are subject to the same relaxed Fourth Amendment standards as individuals walking across a physical land border.⁷

Parallel to this doctrine is the enforcement authority granted within the "100-mile zone." Under INA Section 287(a)(3) and its implementing regulations, CBP asserts the authority to board vessels, trains, and vehicles without a warrant to search for undocumented individuals anywhere within 100 air miles of any external U.S. boundary.¹⁰ Because this definition includes the entirety of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coastlines, an estimated two-thirds of the U.S. population resides within this enforcement band, encompassing major airport hubs in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami.¹⁵ While the 100-mile zone limits CBP to requiring "reasonable suspicion" for vehicle stops (and prohibits the arbitrary entry into private dwellings), the sheer geographic scope of this authority exposes millions of domestic travelers to enhanced surveillance and interrogation simply by navigating the transit infrastructure

leading to an airport.¹⁵

4.3. What ICE Can and Cannot Do at Airports

Understanding the specific operational capabilities and limitations of ICE is paramount for travelers navigating an airport environment. ICE operations at airports primarily occur in public terminal areas, domestic security checkpoints, and jet bridges, rather than the heavily regulated customs inspection zones managed by CBP.⁴

ICE agents possess the legal authority to initiate consensual encounters. They may approach a traveler in a public airport concourse and ask questions regarding identity, travel itinerary, and immigration status. However, the traveler is under no legal obligation to consent to this interaction or answer these questions.³³ To elevate an encounter from a consensual conversation to a lawful investigatory detention (a "Terry stop"), the ICE agent must possess "reasonable suspicion"—based on specific, articulable facts—that the individual is engaged in criminal activity or is present in the United States unlawfully.³⁵ ICE cannot detain an individual based solely on race, ethnicity, religious attire, or language proficiency.³⁷

Furthermore, while ICE agents can effectuate arrests based on administrative warrants (documents generated internally by ICE indicating a civil immigration violation), they cannot rely on these administrative warrants to compel a search of a traveler's locked luggage or encrypted digital devices.²⁸ Without a judicially signed warrant issued by a magistrate judge, or the explicit, voluntary consent of the traveler, ICE agents generally lack the authority to conduct invasive searches of personal property in domestic airport terminals.³³ Travelers must recognize that while ICE may utilize intimidation tactics, their legal authority to compel compliance in a domestic setting is strictly bounded by constitutional limits.

5. Know-Your-Rights (KYR) Resources and Checkpoint Regulations

The deployment of ICE agents to TSA security lines and the automated sharing of passenger manifests between TSA and immigration authorities have transformed domestic air travel into a highly surveilled environment.³⁸ Navigating this landscape requires a deep comprehension of the constitutional protections afforded to individuals and the specific rights delineated by organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Immigration Law Center (NILC).

5.1. General Constitutional Protections

The fundamental protections of the U.S. Constitution apply to all individuals physically present within the United States, regardless of their immigration status.³³ The foremost of these is the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. When approached by law enforcement, an individual possesses the absolute right to remain silent.³⁴ Travelers are not legally obligated to

answer questions regarding their birthplace, their method of entry into the United States, or their current immigration status.³³ Because any information provided to an agent can and will be utilized against the individual in subsequent deportation proceedings, remaining silent is the most effective defensive posture.³³

Equally critical is the Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches. If an ICE or CBP agent requests permission to inspect a traveler's luggage, pockets, or electronic devices, the traveler retains the right to refuse.³⁴ Agents will frequently employ coercive language or frame the request as a command (e.g., "Open this bag"). The appropriate legal response is a clear, unequivocal statement: "I do not consent to this search".³⁴ While officers operating at the functional equivalent of the border may proceed with the search under the border exception regardless of consent, explicitly stating non-consent preserves the traveler's right to challenge the legality of the search in future judicial proceedings.³⁴

5.2. Rights Delineated by Immigration Status

The practical application of these rights fluctuates significantly depending on the legal status of the traveler and the specific context of the encounter (domestic terminal versus international arrival).

Legal Status	Rights and Obligations at Airport Checkpoints
U.S. Citizens	Required to answer questions establishing identity and citizenship. Once verified, citizens cannot be denied entry into the U.S. for refusing to answer extraneous questions or declining to unlock electronic devices. ³⁷ However, refusal may result in prolonged secondary inspection and the temporary or indefinite seizure of hardware. ⁴²
Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs)	Obligated to answer questions verifying identity and permanent resident status. 'resi dent , ³⁷ While refusing to answer further questions regarding political beliefs or religious practices may cause significant

	delay, officials generally cannot deny an LPR entry based on this refusal. LPR status can only be formally revoked by a ruling from an immigration judge, and individuals must never voluntarily surrender their green cards under pressure. ³⁷
Visa Holders / Noncitizens	Subject to maximal scrutiny. Refusing to answer questions, or declining to provide passwords to unlock electronic devices, can be legally construed as a failure to bear the burden of proving admissibility. This can result in immediate denial of entry and rapid repatriation to the country of origin. ³⁷
Undocumented Individuals	Face extreme risk during any aviation travel due to systemic data sharing between TSA and ICE. ³⁹ If intercepted, these individuals should unequivocally exercise the right to remain silent, refuse to produce fraudulent documentation, and demand to speak with an attorney prior to signing any documentation presented by federal agents. ⁴³

5.3. Navigating Primary and Secondary Inspections

The inspection process for arriving international travelers is divided into two phases. Primary inspection involves a brief encounter where a CBP officer reviews travel documents, verifies identity, and assesses initial admissibility.¹⁸ If the officer identifies an irregularity, uncovers a potential hit in law enforcement databases, or simply decides to conduct a random review, the traveler is referred to secondary inspection.¹⁷

Secondary inspection operates as a detailed investigatory environment. Here, CBP agents possess the authority to conduct exhaustive reviews of travel history, evaluate financial stability, scrutinize prior interactions with the criminal justice system, and conduct thorough searches of luggage and electronic devices.¹⁸ Travelers must remain cognizant that while agents possess broad search authority, the Constitution explicitly prohibits the selection of individuals for secondary screening based solely on race, religion, national origin, gender, or political affiliation.³⁷ During secondary inspection, travelers are advised to maintain a calm, professional demeanor, provide strictly truthful answers to required questions regarding identity and customs declarations, and avoid any physical interference with the officers' activities.⁴² If an officer requests the removal of religious headwear for security purposes, the

traveler retains the right to request that the screening be conducted in a private area.³⁷

5.4. Expedited Removal and Aviation Transit

A critical threat facing undocumented travelers and certain noncitizens at airports is the mechanism of Expedited Removal. Established by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, Expedited Removal grants CBP and ICE officers the extraordinary authority to rapidly deport noncitizens who lack proper documentation or who are deemed to have committed fraud, entirely bypassing the immigration court system.¹⁹ Under this process, a federal agent acts as both prosecutor and judge, capable of executing a deportation order within hours of an encounter.²⁰

While historically constrained to individuals arriving at ports of entry or encountered within 100 miles of the border shortly after crossing, administrative efforts during the 2025–2026 period have sought to expand the geographic and temporal scope of Expedited Removal.²¹ For travelers navigating airports, this signifies that an interaction with ICE or CBP could result in immediate detention and rapid expulsion without the opportunity to consult an attorney or present evidence to a judge.²⁰ The sole procedural safeguard within the Expedited Removal framework occurs if the individual explicitly expresses a fear of persecution or torture upon return to their home country. Upon making this declaration, the agent is legally mandated to halt the immediate removal process and refer the individual to an asylum officer for a credible fear screening.¹⁹

6. Airport Safety Checklist: Operational Guidelines

Navigating an airport during a period of heightened immigration enforcement requires rigorous preparation. The following checklist operationalizes constitutional rights and privacy protocols into actionable steps for travelers.

Travel Phase	Operational Directives and Safety Protocols
Before You Travel	Digital Hardening: Turn off biometric unlock features (FaceID/TouchID) and establish a strong alphanumeric passcode.⁴² Documentation: Screenshot your boarding pass to avoid requiring internet connectivity or app access at the checkpoint. Pack physical "Know Your Rights" (KYR) cards.⁴⁹

	Communication: Communicate your exact itinerary, flight numbers, and expected arrival times to a trusted contact or a legal representative.³⁹
At the Airport	Situational Awareness: Observe the environment prior to recording or approaching checkpoints. If ICE is visibly present and you are at high risk, evaluate alternate transit options.⁴⁴ De-escalation: Move calmly and purposefully. Avoid running, sudden movements, or aggressive confrontations, which can generate reasonable suspicion for a detention.³³ Documentation: If you witness an enforcement incident, record from a safe distance, document the time and specific terminal location, and prepare to share the footage only with trusted legal organizations.⁵⁰
If You Are Stopped	Establish Status: Immediately ask the agent, "Am I free to go?".⁴⁴ If yes, depart calmly. Invoke Silence: If detained, state clearly, "I am exercising my right to remain silent. I will not answer questions about my immigration status".³⁴ Refuse Consent: State unambiguously, "I do not consent to a search of my person or my belongings".³⁴ Protect Data: Do not voluntarily unlock your mobile device or provide your password.⁴²

7. Digital Privacy, Device Searches, and Data Protection

The modern traveler transports an unprecedented volume of highly sensitive data—encompassing financial records, attorney-client communications, journalistic source materials, and intimate personal correspondence—within smartphones and laptops.²⁹ The intersection of this massive data consolidation with the diminished Fourth Amendment protections at the border represents one of the most significant civil liberties conflicts of the digital era.²⁹

7.1. The Border Search Exception Applied to Digital Data

Federal agencies, primarily CBP, assert broad administrative authority to conduct warrantless, suspicionless searches of electronic devices at the border and its functional equivalents (airports).⁴² The government argues that a laptop or smartphone is legally indistinguishable from a suitcase, and therefore subject to the same routine inspection protocols designed to interdict contraband.²⁹

Operationally, these inspections are categorized into two tiers. A "basic" or "manual" search involves an officer physically navigating the device's interface to peruse files, photographs, and message histories without the requirement of individualized suspicion.⁴² Conversely, an "advanced" or "forensic" search involves connecting the traveler's device to external extraction equipment (such as Cellebrite or Paragon systems) to clone the hard drive, recover deleted artifacts, and generate comprehensive analytical reports.⁴² Under CBP policy, forensic searches require the officer to articulate a "reasonable suspicion" of a violation of laws enforced by CBP or identify a national security concern.⁴²

The judicial consensus regarding these practices remains heavily fractured. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled that a warrant is required for cell phone searches if the data sought is not digital contraband, while the Fourth Circuit mandates a warrant for forensic searches conducted in furtherance of domestic criminal investigations.³⁰ The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) and the ACLU continue to litigate these issues aggressively, arguing that the vast storage capacity of modern devices necessitates a warrant based on probable cause for any border device search.²⁹ Despite these circuit-level constraints, CBP's operational baseline continues to rely on expansive administrative authority, necessitating severe defensive measures by travelers.⁵⁴

It is imperative to note that current CBP policy prohibits agents from searching data stored exclusively in the cloud. Officers are instructed to place devices in airplane mode or disable network connectivity to ensure they only inspect data residing locally on the physical hardware.⁴²

7.2. Pre-Travel Device Hardening Strategies

To mitigate the catastrophic risk of data compromise during an airport secondary inspection, travelers must adopt proactive digital hygiene strategies before arriving at the terminal. The EFF recommends a comprehensive threat modeling approach centered on data minimization and cryptographic protection.⁴²

The most infallible defense against a border device search is ensuring that sensitive data is not physically present on the hardware traversing the checkpoint. Where feasible, travelers should utilize temporary "burner" devices or factory-reset laptops, ensuring minimal data exposure.⁴² However, travelers must balance this strategy against the reality that presenting completely empty, pristine devices may inadvertently trigger an officer's suspicion and lead to prolonged interrogation.⁴²

A more balanced approach involves aggressive data culling. Prior to travel, individuals should uninstall sensitive applications (e.g., encrypted messaging apps, password vaults) and transfer critical files to secure cloud storage infrastructure, such as Proton Drive or Tresorit.⁴² These files can be safely retrieved once the traveler has cleared the inspection zone. When deleting data, travelers must ensure they empty all "recently deleted" folders and application trash bins, acknowledging that advanced forensic extraction tools may still recover residual digital artifacts.⁴²

To protect the data that remains on the device, travelers must enable full-disk encryption (e.g., FileVault for macOS, BitLocker for Windows), rather than relying solely on superficial screen locks.⁴² Crucially, devices should be fully powered down prior to entering the customs or security area.⁴² Powering off a device ensures that cryptographic keys are purged from the hardware's volatile memory (RAM), placing the device in a state of maximum cryptographic security known as "Before First Unlock" (BFU).⁴²

7.3. Biometric Unlocks Versus Alphanumeric Passcodes

The legal distinction between utilizing a biometric identifier (fingerprint, facial recognition) and providing a memorized alphanumeric passcode is of paramount importance during a secondary inspection or an ICE detention.

The Fifth Amendment protects individuals against compelled self-incrimination. Jurisprudence has generally established that the act of providing a memorized passcode is "testimonial" because it requires an individual to reveal the contents of their own mind.⁵⁷ Therefore, law enforcement faces significant constitutional hurdles in compelling a traveler to disclose a passcode. Conversely, physical characteristics—such as a thumbprint or facial geometry—are frequently categorized as non-testimonial physical evidence. Consequently, federal agents can legally compel an individual to look at their phone's camera or press their thumb to a biometric sensor to unlock the device without violating the Fifth Amendment.⁵³

To maintain the highest level of legal and technical protection, travelers must categorically disable all biometric unlock features (FaceID, TouchID) before entering the airport.⁴² Devices must be secured exclusively with strong, alphanumeric passcodes—ideally consisting of four to five randomly generated words.⁴² While U.S. citizens retain the right to refuse to provide this passcode, they must carefully weigh this refusal against the likelihood of prolonged detention and the indefinite confiscation of their hardware for forensic cracking attempts.⁴²

8. Secure Recording, Evidence Handling, and Legal Admissibility

In an era characterized by escalating, often militarized enforcement operations within domestic spaces, community documentation serves as a vital mechanism for accountability. Video evidence captured by bystanders has successfully thwarted abusive practices by ICE, substantiated claims of racial profiling, and secured the release of individuals subjected to unlawful detention.⁵⁹ However, recording federal agents in a high-tension environment like an airport requires strict adherence to legal boundaries and rigorous technical protocols.

8.1. First Amendment Protections for Legal Observers

The First Amendment unequivocally protects the right of individuals—regardless of their immigration status or whether they possess formal journalistic credentials—to record video and capture photographs of law enforcement officers performing their duties in public spaces.⁶¹ This protection extends to documenting ICE agents, CBP officers, and National Guard personnel operating within the public areas of airport terminals.⁶²

Filming law enforcement from a safe distance does not constitute obstruction of justice, nor does it meet the legal definition of "doxing," despite claims to the contrary by certain administrative officials.⁶² Furthermore, federal agents cannot legally confiscate a recording device, demand to view the captured footage, or delete data without a judicially authorized warrant.⁶⁴ If an agent attempts to seize a device, the observer should clearly and calmly state, "I do not consent to the seizure or search of my device."

8.2. Methodologies for Safe Recording

The WITNESS Media Lab has established standardized, ethical guidelines for documenting immigration enforcement safely and effectively:

- **Maintain Distance and Safety:** Record from a safe, unobstructed distance without physically interfering with the agents or the arrest process. Any physical interference provides agents with immediate legal grounds to initiate an arrest for obstruction.⁵⁰
- **Capture Contextual Evidence:** Ensure the footage includes identifiable landmarks, terminal numbers, street signs, or a smartphone home screen to definitively authenticate the time, date, and location of the incident.⁶³

- **Document Identifying Details:** Focus the camera horizontally to capture a wider field of view. Prioritize recording agent badge numbers, uniform insignias (e.g., distinguishing between "ICE", "CBP", or "ERO"), and the license plates or fleet numbers of transport vehicles.⁵⁰
- **Narrate the Scene:** Provide calm, objective audio narration of the events as they unfold, describing the number of agents present, their actions, and any use of force or weapons.⁵⁰
- **Protect the Victim:** To respect the privacy and dignity of the individual being targeted, avoid focusing the camera directly on their face unless absolutely necessary for identification purposes requested by legal counsel.⁵⁰

8.3. Metadata Scrubbing and Secure Digital Storage

Digital files inherently contain metadata—hidden strings of data embedded within photographs and videos that detail the precise GPS coordinates of where the file was created, the specific device model used, and exact timestamps.²² If an observer captures footage of an ICE surge and uploads the raw file directly to social media or shares it via unencrypted channels, law enforcement agencies or hostile actors can extract this metadata to identify the observer's location and track their device.²²

Before sharing any documentation with advocacy groups or the press, all metadata must be systematically scrubbed.⁶⁷

Metadata Scrubbing Tool	Deployment Profile	Operational Strength
Metadata2Go	Web-based / Cloud	Accessible interface for rapid, on-the-go scrubbing without requiring software installation.
MAT2	Linux / CLI / Extension	Robust, open-source tool highly recommended by privacy advocates for stripping metadata from images, audio, and documents. ⁶⁸
ExifTool	Cross-Platform CLI	The industry standard for reading, writing, and stripping EXIF data; highly customizable for advanced

		users. ⁶⁸
MetaClean	Enterprise / Automated	Automated solution designed to prevent inadvertent data disclosure in professional legal environments. ⁶⁹

Once the footage is sanitized, the scrubbed version may be distributed for public awareness. However, the *original, unaltered* file must be transferred immediately to secure, end-to-end encrypted storage platforms (e.g., Proton Drive, Tresorit, or dedicated encrypted external drives) and shared exclusively with trusted legal partners to preserve its evidentiary value.⁷⁰

8.4. Chain of Custody and Evidentiary Admissibility

For eyewitness video footage to be successfully introduced as evidence in the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) or federal court to challenge a deportation order, its authenticity and integrity must be unimpeachable.⁷²

While immigration proceedings are administrative and generally favor the admissibility of evidence provided it is probative and fundamentally fair, government attorneys will aggressively challenge the authenticity of digital footage.⁷⁴ To withstand judicial scrutiny and preempt claims of digital manipulation, a rigorous "Chain of Custody" must be maintained.⁷³ The original raw file must never be altered, edited, or redacted; all analytical work must be performed on forensic copies.⁷³

To operationalize this, legal observers must document every transfer of the data using a standardized format:

Plaintext

CHAIN OF CUSTODY — EYES ON ICE

Recorder Name:

Date:

Time:

Location:

Device Used:

Original File Name:

Transfer Method:

Who Received the File:

Notes:

Maintaining this chronological log ensures that the identity, authenticity, and legal integrity of the footage can be verified. Failure to establish a complete chain of custody may result in the immigration judge suppressing the evidence entirely, potentially jeopardizing a vital defense against removal.⁷⁵

9. Organizing Framework: Avoid, Replace, Protect, Respond

As federal enforcement metastasizes into public transit and aviation infrastructure, immigrant communities and allied organizations must pivot from reactive panic to structured, proactive defense. The strategic organizing framework centers on four synergistic pillars: Avoid, Replace, Protect, and Respond.

9.1. Tactical Avoidance and Transportation Replacement

- **AVOID:** The primary operational directive during an enforcement surge is threat avoidance. This requires continuous intelligence gathering and monitoring of DHS activity to identify airports with an active ICE presence. By tracking domestic transfer flights and utilizing crowdsourced reporting, communities can advise vulnerable individuals to alter travel plans, coordinate flights with neighbors for safety in numbers, and utilize alternate ground routes when aviation transit becomes untenable.
- **REPLACE:** When airports become hostile environments, communities must engineer secure transportation alternatives. This involves the logistical coordination of community shuttle programs and the creation of shared ride rosters. By establishing weekly volunteer driver rotations, communities can facilitate safe, interstate transit for affected populations, bypassing federal chokepoints entirely.⁷⁶

9.2. Protection Protocols and Rapid Response Networks

- **PROTECT:** Individual protection relies on extreme technological and legal preparedness. Travelers must carry physical KYR cards to assert their rights without relying on electronic devices.⁴⁹ Device privacy must be absolute: Bluetooth and Wi-Fi auto-connect features must be disabled to prevent localized tracking, airplane mode should be utilized whenever possible within the terminal, and biometric unlocks must be deactivated prior to reaching security checkpoints. Furthermore, travelers must pre-arrange legal contacts and establish family preparedness plans before departure.
- **RESPOND:** The response phase encompasses aggressive, coordinated civic pushback. This requires supporting airport workers who resist the militarization of their workplaces and applying organized pressure on vendors and contractors collaborating with ICE. The cornerstone of the response phase is the mobilization of Rapid Response Networks (RRNs).

RRNs serve as the tactical nervous system of community defense.⁵⁹ Operating via dedicated hotlines—such as the ICIRR Family Support Network Hotline or the United We Dream MigraWatch Network—dispatchers field reports of ICE activity in real-time.⁷⁸ Upon receiving a verified report of an airport detention, the RRN rapidly deploys specialized components:

- **Legal Observers and Documenters:** Dispatched to record the enforcement action and secure badge numbers and vehicle data.
- **Drivers and Transport Volunteers:** Mobilized to safely extract family members or witnesses from the airport perimeter.
- **Language and Childcare Support:** Activated to provide immediate translation services for detainees and emergency care for dependents separated during the surge.
- **Bail Fund Coordinators:** Engaged to aggregate financial resources to secure the release of detained individuals from ICE custody.

10. Public Records, FOIA Starter Kit, and Community Media Distribution

To dismantle the opacity surrounding ICE and CBP operations at airports, organizations must systematically weaponize transparency laws and strategic media distribution to expose enforcement patterns.

10.1. Leveraging the Freedom of Information Act

The mechanics and statistical impacts of operations like Metro Surge and Midway Blitz are frequently obscured by DHS.²⁵ The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and state-level public records equivalents provide a legal mechanism to compel the release of internal directives, inter-agency communications between TSA and ICE, and use-of-force reports. Advocates should utilize the centralized DHS FOIA Portal for federal inquiries, and search "[your state] public records request" for local law enforcement collaboration data.

A strategically drafted FOIA request must be precise, identifying exact dates, locations, and the nature of the requested communications. Requesters representing advocacy organizations or the press should uniformly claim a fee waiver by establishing that the release of the information is squarely in the public interest.

Plaintext

To Whom It May Concern:

I am requesting all records, reports, communications, and documents related to:

This request includes emails, memos, directives, video, audio, and internal communications.

I request a fee waiver as this information is in the public interest.

Sincerely,
[Name]

10.2. Cross-Posting Strategy and Media Distribution

Information regarding airport surges must be disseminated rapidly and effectively to maximize community awareness and political pressure. This requires a tiered, cross-platform distribution strategy:

1. **TikTok (Short-form):** Utilization of brief, highly visual alerts and rapid KYR tutorials to achieve maximum velocity and reach within vulnerable demographics.
2. **Reddit (Medium-form):** Deployment of localized, peer-verified tactical updates and abridged situational summaries to communities like r/EyesOnIce.
3. **Substack (Longform):** Publication of deep-dive policy analyses, FOIA findings, and comprehensive legal breakdowns free of paywalls.

To ensure clarity and actionability across medium-form platforms, organizers should utilize a standardized briefing format:

Plaintext

TL;DR:

- What happened
- Why it matters
- What the community should do next

Full breakdown on Substack (no paywall).

11. Mental Health, Community Care, and Final Call to Action

The psychological toll of enduring, observing, and organizing against militarized interior enforcement is profound. The constant threat of family separation and the witnessing of state violence within domestic transit hubs generates acute, compounding trauma within immigrant

communities and activist networks.⁸⁰ Sustainable community defense requires institutionalizing mental health care protocols as a core operational component.

For legal observers and witnesses, chronic exposure to enforcement footage induces secondary trauma. Best practices dictate mandatory breaks from processing visual evidence, utilizing physical grounding techniques, and maintaining a strict prohibition against "doomscrolling" through enforcement media. For RRN coordinators and organizers, the implementation of rotating volunteer responsibilities, mandatory debriefing sessions following critical incidents, and the establishment of a "buddy system" during field deployments are essential structural safeguards against burnout.

The escalation of immigration enforcement into U.S. airports demands a unified, highly disciplined response. Travelers, allies, and organizers must widely share KYR resources and digital privacy protocols. Individuals are urged to join or construct Rapid Response Networks within their local jurisdictions, provide material support to immigrant rights organizations, and commit to documenting abuses safely. By protecting one another, maintaining secure operational archives, and staying connected across platforms, communities can systematically mitigate the impact of airport enforcement surges and defend the fundamental rights of all travelers.

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